

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands Freedmen's Bureau Records

Family History Library

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The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly referred to as "The Freedmen's Bureau," was created during reconstruction to help with relief efforts for freed enslaved persons and others devastated by the war. It was active 1865-1872 and the records created by the Bureau contain a wide variety of details about the African American experience during enslavement and transitioning to freedom. This presentation is an overview of the record types found in the records of The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.

A refugee is a person fleeing from the ravages of war. Freedmen were the enslaved persons freed by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and others who freed themselves during wartime. Abandoned lands are the properties confiscated by the Union Army. The collection contains 1.5 million digital images covering the following categories:

- Education
- Rations, including housing, clothing, and food
- Hospital and medical
- Employment, labor contracts, training, and apprenticeships
- Veteran assistance for back pay, bounty, and pensions
- Marriage records and reuniting families
- Claims and settlements, including some court records

Genealogical Value of the Records

- Education records: The need for education was great as freedmen had been forbidden by law to learn to read and write. Over 4,300 schools were set up by the Bureau and were often assisted by charitable organizations such as abolitionist societies and churches.
- Food, clothing, and housing: the immediate needs for food and shelter were addressed by the Bureau. Surviving records include ration lists, addresses, refugee camps and other housing.
- Medical needs: Over 100 hospitals were established.
- Labor contracts: The Bureau assisted with labor contracts, apprenticeships, and other types of employment. Records include contracts, settlement of claims, and complaints.
- Veteran assistance: Help filling out pension applications and orders for back pay.
- Voter Registration oaths and lists: After emancipation and the passing of the 14th and 15th amendments blacks began to exercise their rights as citizens and vote. Voter lists were often created.

Finding the Records

[FamilySearch Historical Records](#)

- Indexed or name searchable collections
- Browse image collections

[FamilySearch Catalog](#)

[Help with FamilySearch Catalog and research tips](#)

- FamilySearch Research Wiki articles

[African American Freedmen's Bureau Records](#)

[African American Genealogy](#)

[Researching African American Genealogy](#)

Additional Tools

- Websites

[Mapping the Freedmen's Bureau](#)

[Mapping Occupation](#)

[Interactive Map of Contraband Camps](#)

[The Freedmen's Bureau Online](#)

[DiscoverFreedmen](#)